

On Top of the World

Ruth Rogers traces the global
success of the Connemara Pony

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Since the inception of the Stud Book in 1923, the Connemara Pony has etched its name all over the World. Today no less than sixteen international societies championing the breed are in existence are in place.

In past decades, great names like Dundrum, Ashfield Bobby Sparrow, and Stroller readily come to mind as true legends of the jumping arena.

Today, there are Connemara ponies all over the world that have provided owners with immeasurable pleasure on the hunting field, eventing grounds, show jumping arena, dressage ring, cross-Country course, driving and in-hand.

More importantly the mares and stallions who were exported have, in their own right, established foundation bloodlines and opened up new opportunities to breeders in overseas countries. They now represent many European nations including Denmark, Poland, Italy, Luxemburg, France, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland and England.

Ireland's Sillogue Darkie has both individual and Nations Cup wins in Belgium, Italy, France, England and Holland to his credit and was a leading light on the Irish team at the Pony European Championships in Freudenberg, Germany and carried the same form into 2008 with rider Jessica Burke from Co. Galway. He also has two stallion brothers in Ireland

OVERSEAS BUYERS

In the the 1960s breeders became aware of the extraordinary potential of the Connemara pony. Buyers from Australia, America, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, England, and Holland travelled to Connemara in search of foundation stock. Quite often it was owing to economic reasons that many of our most valued stock was exported as the sale of a pony generated much-needed income for the breeders.

The Carna Dun and Carna Bobby lines that left Ireland at that time have gone on to dominate in the performance field.

The famous Marble (Rebel Wind-Callowfeenish Dolly 2nd) was one of the most influential and outstanding Connemara stallions who ever left Ireland.

Judged reserve champion at Clifden in 1975, he was chosen as a typical example to represent Ireland at the Essen Equitana show in Germany, where he attracted much attention and was subsequently sold to Lene Neilsen's stud in Denmark in 1976.

To day the Marble line is in demand in both stallion and mare pedigrees and several breeders in Ireland have travelled to Europe in the hope of acquiring such lines.

One of the most successful performance ponies in France in recent years was Dexter Leam Pondi, by Leam Finnegan. His dam White Granite (Marble-Ganty Jane 2nd) was exported from Ireland and there is no doubt she will take her rightful place in the history of Connemara ponies in France. Dexter has now handed down his immense jumping ability to his son Magic Leam Pondi, proving yet again the success of the outstanding mare lines that have been handed down from Marble.

Judged overall reserve champion at the French National show in 2008 was Kingstown Rory bred by Joe Gorham in Clifden, he is a full brother to the Clifden supreme champion Kingstown Dana.

In the Southern Hemisphere there are now numerous populations of Connemara breeding stock. The late Donald Kenny conducted the first inspections of Connemaras in South Africa and approved them for entry in the Irish Stud Book. The ponies had all originally come from Ireland, but South Africa did not have the original registration papers. One can therefore thank Donald Kenny for putting the South African Connemaras back on the international map. The numbers of Connemaras and Connemara crosses are growing steadily and they can be seen competing successfully in all disciplines. There are now approximately two hundred Connemaras, both purebred and part-breeds in South Africa and in Namibia and Botswana.

AUSTRALIA

In the past two decades, the Irish Connemara influence in Australia has been colossal, with the blue line through Carna Bobby having the biggest impact.

In 1963 the first Irish Connemara pony exported was Island King by Carna Bobby out of Doon Lass. He covered mostly non-Connemara mares and many were sent to various parts of that vast country.

One stallion and two mares were sent to Australia in the late 1970s have been extremely influential in the formation of present day Australian breeding.

They are Tulira Fuschia (Tulira Máirtín-Tulira Heather) bred by Lady Hemphill; Willie Diamond's Four of Diamonds (Rebel Wind-Leam Grey), and Abbeyleix Finbar, bred by the late Lady de Vesci and bought by Padraic Hynes as a foal. He was to leave Ireland as a yearling colt.

Twenty years later, the stallion Castle Baron (Abbeyleix Owen-Castle Dame) arrived in Australia and introduced the 'Village' line. Bred by Henry O'Toole in Clifden, Castle Baron is a full brother to O'Toole's great champions Castle Urchin and Castle Countess.

He was bought by Sue & Barton Clarke from Glenormiston Stud in Queensland as a two year old, and was virtually unbeaten in the show ring. Now, thanks to the progeny of this foundation stock, Australian Connemaras are leaders in several disciplines.

It is interesting to note that, thanks to more convenient travel arrangements, Australian breeders are broadening their horizons as they seek further stock, especially from breeders in Europe and Ireland.

The Connemara scene in Australia is about to enter a new phase of development. The major factor is the membership approval of the new (2007) Stud book Rules. The CPBSA will ask the C.P.B.S. to approve several small variations to the new rules. Land distances, the relatively small size of the herd, and the feasibility of using 'shuttle' stallions is being examined.

BRITISH SUCCESS

Killacorran Blue (Blue Smokie-Caravilla Rose) (King of the Hills-Abbey Jen) has proved yet again that Ireland can produce top international ponies. His breeder Seamus Glynn from Ballyglass, Claremorris, Co. Mayo bought Carravilla Rose from Liam Walsh in Hollymount and later sold Killacorran Blue at the Clifden Mart in 2000 for £150. Later he left Ireland with just a foal cert. In the words of his owner Gina Stoddart "he is the most delightful and versatile Connemara pony you could wish to meet, he has given us everything". On the long road to success when ridden by Eliza Stoddart, he hunted in Leicestershire, attended Fernie Hunt Pony Club Camp and did pony club eventing, qualifying for the Championships in 2006 and 2007. He competed in Mountain & Moorland working hunter classes, qualifying HOYS as a five -year old, was the BSPS Novice WHP Champion in 2006, qualified for the RIHS 153cms WHP classes in 2007, and went on to finish third in the Necarne Castle CCNP** that same year. He also won Pony Trials at Gatcombe Park and Weston Park in the spring of 2008, leading to selection for the British squad at the Pony European Eventing Championships in Switzerland, where he was a member of the silver medal-winning team. He also finished 5th individually.

Killacorran Blue has now gone to a new home in Wiltshire with a talented young jockey, Pumbaa Goess-Saurau (11), with whom he is forging a wonderful new partnership both on the hunting field and competitively dressage, show jumping and eventing.

The Stoddart family also has another promising Connemara, Doonagore Boy, who shares some of the good lines. He is only a five year old, but was Reserve Champion at the Burghley Eventing Pony Final last September. He belongs to Eliza's younger brother Joss, but she helps to produce him. He is dun and has a show jumping record from Ireland with his previous owners

Athenry Cliff (Maam Hill-Derrybrien Early) bred by John Duffy from Kiltulla, Athenry, was a successful Grade A show jumper and eventer in Ireland prior to being exported to a family in Berkshire who have also enjoyed considerable success.

Glenayre Bay Surf (Grange King's Surf-Mount Gable) was selected on the Eventing Team and also competed in Switzerland in the World Championship.

Meanwhile Ballinaboy Reamus (Shackleton-Ballinaboy Bella) is a promising young dun pony making a name for himself as a competent all-rounder in England.

Also in the U.K. the grey stallion Troubadour (Moy Hazy Cove-Tuam Lass) owned by Michael & Orla Igoe Kippure has been a consistent performer who has numerous championships in many disciplines.

In 2007 Bunowen Castle Ri (Village Boy-Bunowen Castle Queen) ridden by Matthew Lawrence became only the second pony ever to win the Mountain & Moorlands championship twice at Olympia.

Castle Comet a full brother to Castle Baron became the first ever Connemara to win double awards at H.O.Y.S. and Olympia

Lough Fadda Best Man (Innellan Kestrel-Cuckoo Valley Candy) bred by Padraic Heanue was prominent under saddle last season as was Glencarrig Duke (Castlestrange Fionn - Glencroft Amy) ridden by Chantelle Holmes judged Best of Breed at Olympia 2008.

HALL OF FAME

The American Society each year presents two Hall of Fame awards in breeding, to honour a stallion and a mare with a positive influence on the breed through their offspring.

Previous recipients include Canal Laurinston (Callowfenish Mairtin-Village Laura) bred by Padraic Hynes owned by Joanie Webester from Stonybrook Connemaras in California, he performed with distinction in dressage, eventing, and driving and was crowned outstanding Connemara stallion of 2006.

The Broodmare Trophy last year went to Bar S Heather (Rory Ruadh - Queen of Hill) who was sold as a foal by her breeder Padraig Curran in Moycullen.

In 2008 Grange Finn Sparrow, (Coosheen Finn - Dun Sparrow) bred by Lady Maria Levenge took the Hall of Fame award for breeding.

Meanwhile Cashelbay Kim (Glensvalley Grey-Beal na Mulla Kim) bred by Robbie Fallon at Cashelbay Stud has performed admirably in three disciplines in California winning the A.C.P.S. Bronze medals in eventing, dressage and jumping.

A sensational stallion in the U.S. is the bay 21-year-old Ballinaboy Eamon (Loobeen Larry-Ocean Bambi). Col A.J. Morris bred him in Ireland. He was Connemara of the Year in 1997 and over the years consistently produced top class performance ponies including Shammer Sandman, Shammer Jake and King of Hearts.

His full brother Ballinaboy Tom stands at stud in Ireland.

Garry & John Bolger run Waterfield Farm in Massachusetts where several ponies using the Coral prefix have done extremely well including the resident stallion Coral Bobby. Other Waterfield ponies can be seen competing in New England, New York and Pennsylvania.

The stallion Robuck (Tulira Robuck - Lecarrow) looks to have a bright future. He qualified for the American Eventing Championships and was awarded USDF/ACPS All Breed Awards at Training and First Level and received the highest ACPS Achievement Award "Award of Excellence in Dressage"

It must be said that Tulira Robuck (Earl of Castlefrench - Tulira Heather) has some exceptional performance and In-hand stock in many countries proving that Lady Hemphill's great foundation stock is very much alive.

SCANDINAVIA

November 1991 the Swedish rider Pia Lewin bought Poetic Justice (Ballydonagh Casanova-Gloves Misty) as a three year old. He went on to have a highly successful jumping career and his progeny have shown that this one was something very special.

Today Poetic Justice is one of the hottest properties in Sweden and his offspring have jumped internationally at the highest levels

A famous daughter is Poetic Moonlight who has been winning at major shows in the country. She produced the stallion Silver Shadow, who competed for Ireland at the European championships last season.

The performance stallion Kilpatrick Fionn (Abbeyleix Fionn - Moorland Juliet) prior to being exported to Sweden, where he was a member of European teams and won many competitions here.

Lexus Justice (Westside Fred-Dunamoney Lass) also competed for Sweden at the Europeans in Avenches last summer.

The Connemara flag is flying high in Finland as the new President of the International Society, Tuula Pyöriä resides there. In 1979 she bought her first Connemara mare Espe Etta, who was ridden, driven, shown in-hand and used for breeding. Today her progeny and their offspring have extended the breed to many parts of Finland

There are known to be 16 show jumping, nine dressage, and five eventing Connemaras competing there with much success. Park Benjamin (Ashfield Festy-Spanish Dancer) represented Finland at show jumping in the European championships. The mare Kate (Killreagh Kim-Lissoughter Laura) bred by Christy O'Sullivan in Ireland, now twenty-four has also greatly contributed to the breeding pool in Finland.

BELGIUM & HOLLAND

There are eleven well known jumping, five eventing and three dressage Connemara ponies in Belgium. Ard Conneely, a Clifden and Dublin Supreme Champion, went to Belgium where he was ridden, driven, and runs with his mares. In 2005 he won the Supreme Connemara Pony Championship.

At present, Poland has five eventing, six Show jumping, and five dressage ponies competing. They include Clougherboy Mirah, (Westside Mirah-Secret Pal) and Annilaun Sweet Jessie (Annilaun Oscar-Sweet Charity) who represented Poland in show jumping and eventing at the European championships. Meanwhile Milford Russett Heather (Ashfield Hunters Jewel-Milford Heather Belle has evented for Italy.

You can find a Connemara at the top of almost every discipline in Holland. The European Championships demonstrated this very well, especially the three- day eventing team in the past years. There Ashfield Silver Ghost (Ormond Oliver-Ashfield Silver Cloud) is enjoying a great show jumping career with his rider Brigitte Smits. Other uncommon disciplines have already heard of the Connemara pony, with Dun Alice competing in the highest level of endurance. She is one of the two ponies in Holland that completed 160 kilometres in one day.

The progeny of Danish stallions have done very well in Europe and Ireland, especially the offspring of Laerkens Cascade Dawn and Hazy Match. Denmark is the hub of present day Connemara breeding apart from Ireland.

The purchase by Gunner Harder of the stallion Hazy Dawn (Dale Haze-Castle Park) foaled in 1985 and bred by Johnny Lee in Moycullen heralded a new era. It was the inception of the Hazy line in Denmark which could be rated on a par with the success of Marble.

Last autumn Sue Clarke in Australia introduced the green "Hazy" line when she imported Frederiksminde Hazy Miracle, a full brother to Skousboe Morning Rock to stand alongside Castle Barron at Glenormiston stud.

IRISH BREEDERS

Some Irish breeders are now seeking to regain some of the genes that left the country, especially those with Marble in their veins. The proven Danish stallion Skousboe Morning Rock (Hazy Dawn-Frederiksminde Mellow) owned by Sternbergs stud, in Germany will stand at Spiddal during 2009. He is the only stallion that holds a Supreme Championship sash in three countries, Germany, Denmark, and Ireland.

In mare classes Villa Colleen bred by Liam Walsh and owned by Dr.Sabine Bachmann of Glaskopf stud has impressed many judges in Germany.

In an effort to rejuvenate old bloodlines even further, Sean Dunne from Garryhinch stud purchased the mare Banks Vanilla (Teglsdrup Duke - Banks Squares Do Do) when she was adjudged Best Pony at inspections there in 2006. Her success continued in Ireland, as she was Supreme Champion at Oughterard in 2007, and again at the Midlands show in 2008.

Henry O'Toole imported the stallion Janus (Oxenholm Marble-Brants Hammer Julie) from Sweden and his decision proved worth as he went on to win the Supreme Championship at the R.D.S. in 2006.

The progress made by Clifden Mart, Cavan, and Goresbridge sales has provided a platform for breeders to buy and sell ponies. Over the years, many colt foals were registered and travelled

with only a foal certificate. They were gelded or used as stallions when they left Ireland, but sadly few if any official records were retained, and many of those are now our best ambassadors.

There is no denying that Clifden show each August remains the showcase for the breed here , but Ballinalee, Dublin, Roundstone, and The Midland shows also produce the cream of the crop. In conclusion the Connemara Pony is flourishing all over the world, but it is vital that stallions are carefully selected to retain the vision put in place by the founders in 1923. It is they who established our very own native breed and type. Long may it last.